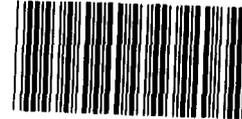


General Government Division

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March 16, 1992

The Honorable Gerry Sikorski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Service
Committee on Post Office and
Civil Service
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

To assist the Subcommittee in its consideration of H.R. 3149, a bill "to strengthen the authority to require safe workplaces for federal employees and for other purposes", you asked us to summarize our work on the condition of federal buildings controlled by the General Services Administration (GSA) and GSA's stewardship of its buildings. This letter responds to your request.

As one of the federal government's principal real estate and business agents, GSA has the responsibility of providing federal agencies and federal employees a quality work environment -- safe, healthy, and functional working space and other facilities -- in which they can carry out the government's business. Nationwide, GSA manages or oversees some 7,400 buildings -- 1,700 owned and 5,700 leased -- which contain about 247 million square feet of workspace and house various federal agencies and over 1 million federal employees.

Our May 1991 report, Federal Buildings: Actions Needed to Prevent Further Deterioration and Obsolescence (GAO/GGD-91-57, May 13, 1991), disclosed that some GSA-controlled federal buildings have been neglected and gradually allowed to become deteriorated, antiquated, and in a few instances unsafe. Primarily because of funding limitations and ineffective GSA management and oversight of identified repair and modernization requirements, needed repairs and improvements to bring some buildings up to acceptable quality and safety and health standards have been deferred. Besides decreasing the value of federal assets and costing the government more money in the long run, the failure to

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make needed building repairs and improvements contributes to poor quality working space, impedes agencies' mission effectiveness, and in some instances jeopardizes employees' safety and health.

To help improve existing building conditions and better prevent further problems, the report made a series of recommendations to GSA that were aimed at improving the agency's management and oversight of building repair and modernization requirements; targeting the most seriously deteriorated, functionally obsolete, or unsafe buildings; and promoting more informed congressional decisionmaking regarding needed funding levels and which particular building repair and modernization projects to fund.

In commenting on a draft of our report, GSA agreed that many federal buildings need improvements and modernization and promised several corrective actions which, if fully and effectively implemented, generally would be responsive to most of the recommendations. However, GSA took strong exception to (1) our conclusion that ineffective management and oversight of identified repair and modernization requirements had contributed to deterioration and functional obsolescence at the Pentagon and other federal buildings and (2) how we characterized some specific findings concerning the severity, causes, and adverse effects of building conditions and GSA's deferred actions to correct them. Our May 1991 report presented GSA's comments in their entirety and included a detailed discussion and evaluation of each of the key comments.

We are concerned about the adequacy of GSA's response to our May 1991 report. The agency exhibited a general defensiveness and an unwillingness to accept responsibility for the building conditions disclosed in the report. Further, its completed and planned actions, even if fully implemented, would not correct all of the conditions we reported. While we do not consider GSA to have been fully responsive to our recommendations we have not done any additional work since our May 1991 report to determine whether or not the conditions in GSA-controlled buildings have improved.

I trust that this letter is responsive to your request and that it will help the Subcommittee in its consideration of the proposed reforms to bring about safer, healthier

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workplaces for federal employees. If you have any questions or comments, please call me at (202) 275-8676 or Robert B. Mangum of my staff at (202) 501-2538.

Sincerely yours,



L. Nye Stevens
Director, Government Business
Operations Issues